

## Description of the advertisement call of the Moroccan midwife toad (*Alytes maurus* Pasteur & Bons, 1962)

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The Moroccan midwife toad is to date the only species of *Alytes* whose advertisement call remains undescribed. We describe the calls of this species from recordings obtained in a population of the Parc National de Tazzeka (Middle Atlas range) on 21-24 April 2010. We sampled the population calls with two methods: (1) we recorded advertisement calls of focal animals at close range with digital audio equipment (Sound Devices 722 & Sennheiser MKH70 or Olympus LS-10), and some of the recorded individuals were captured after recording and their weight and size was measured; and (2) we also placed an automated timed recording station (Song Meter SM1) in the population, for long-term monitoring of calling activity. Recordings obtained were analyzed using Raven Pro 1.3 software. Males call at dusk and at night during rainy nights. They may call from underground or under rocks or on the surface. Both males carrying eggs and males without them were observed calling. We did not hear female calls. Soil temperature during the focal recordings was between 13 and 18.9°C. The mean snout-vent length and weight of the seven males recorded and captured subsequently were 40.2 mm and 6.91 g (ranges 38-43 mm and 6-8 g). A total of 7 focal recordings of individual males including 202 calls were obtained for analysis. The call is a short tonal burst of sound, like a short whistle. It has a very brief rise time (attack) and a longer fall time, and no additional salient amplitude modulation in the call. The total call duration of the focal recordings was short (mean 97.3 ms, range 77-217 ms). The call has a very simple spectral structure with one emphasized frequency (mean 1324 Hz, range 1218-1406 Hz) and no harmonics nor frequency modulation. Overall, both adult sizes and call parameters are well within the range of variation of those of *Alytes obstetricans*. The calls are shorter in duration than those of *Alytes cisternasii* and *Alytes dickhilleni* at similar temperatures.

## INTRODUCTION

The Moroccan midwife toad (*Alytes maurus*) is the least known of all the species of *Alytes*. After the initial debate about its full specific status (ARNTZEN & SZYMURA, 1984, ARNTZEN & GARCÍA-PARIS, 1995, BONIS & GENIEZ, 1996, SALVADOR, 1996; ALTABA, 1997), an effort has been made to obtain information about its basic biology such as distribution, phenology and co-occurrence with other amphibians (LIBIS, 1985; MELLADO & MATEO, 1992; DONAIRE-BARROSO & BOGAERTS, 2003, MATEO et al., 2003, DONAIRE-BARROSO et al., 2006; PLEGUEZUELOS et al., 2010). However, basic ecological information and more specifically behavioral information is still not available for *A. maurus*.

The species of *Alytes* studied to date have a courtship that involves male emitting advertisement calls to attract females (CRESPO, 1981, BUSH, 1993, 1996, 1997, MÁRQUEZ & BOSCH, 1995; BUSH et al., 1996) and vocalizing females approaching the calling male (MÁRQUEZ & VERRELL, 1991; BUSH, 1997). Subsequently, an elaborate amplexus occurs on land (DE L'ISLE, 1873; HÉRON-ROYER, 1886; BOULENGER, 1912; LÓPEZ-JURADO et al., 1979; RODRÍGUEZ-JIMÉNEZ, 1984; MÁRQUEZ & VERRELL, 1991; BUSH, 1993; BUSH & BELL, 1997), where males twine the strings with fertilized eggs around their ankles and keep them on land for several weeks until the tadpoles are fully formed. The male then walks to the water and releases the egg masses and the tadpoles hatch.

In this paper we contribute to the knowledge of *A. maurus* by describing its advertisement call, a characteristic that can be of use to detect the presence of this secretive species in unexplored parts of its potential range and that can also be used to establish acoustic monitoring protocols of key populations of this species (e.g., determining frequency ranges of the species advertisement calls for automated recorders, etc.)

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

Males were recorded in Tazzeka National Park, Taza (Morocco) at night on 21–24 April 2010 (34°08'23 12"N; 04°04'09 09"W, 1283 m a.s.l.) in a rocky area adjacent to permanent springs known as Ain Khabab. Focal recordings of localized males were obtained with a Sound Devices 722 digital recorder with a Sennheiser MKH70 microphone or with an Olympus LS-10 digital recorder on the nights of 21 and 24. Recordings were made at 96 KHz and 24 bits. When the recorded individual could be captured after recording, the air and soil temperature near the recorded individual were subsequently measured to the nearest 0.1°C with a Fluke K 72 thermocouple thermometer. In addition, snout-vent length (SVL) to the nearest millimeter was measured by pressing the male flat (ventrally) against a ruler, and weight was measured with a Pesola spring scale to the nearest 0.5 g. If the males were carrying eggs, the total number of eggs visible from the top plus the number visible from the bottom of the animal was considered an estimate of the clutch size. All animals collected were released in the site to prevent any impact on the population.

In addition to the focal recordings, additional recordings were obtained with an automated recording system (Song Meter SM1, by Wildlife Acoustics, Concord, MA, USA),

which was left in the calling area from 21 to 24 April with a recording protocol of 55 minutes/hour. Automated recordings were made at 44.1 KHz and 16 bits. Air and soil temperature (to the nearest 0.3°C) and relative humidity (to the nearest 2.8 %) were recorded with Hobo Pro-V2 and Hobo Pendant 64 Kb dataloggers adjacent to the automated recording station.

Recordings were analyzed with Raven Pro 1.3 software (CHARIF et al., 2008) on Apple Macintosh computers in the facilities of Fonoteca Zoológica (Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales, Madrid). For spectral analyses, a window size of 4000 samples was used (7.93 Hz precision). Recordings were deposited in the collection of Fonoteca Zoológica (FZ Collection numbers 8994–9000). A sample recording is available on line on the web checklist <[www.FonoZoo.com/frogcallsoftheworld](http://www.FonoZoo.com/frogcallsoftheworld)>

## RESULTS

Males call at dusk and at night during rainy weather. They may call from underground or under rocks or on the surface. Both males carrying eggs and males without them were observed calling. Only one male was observed (and recorded) carrying eggs (estimate 35 eggs, fig. 1). We did not hear female calls (fig. 2). Only one type of call was recorded or heard during the study period. The advertisement call of *Alytes maurus* is a simple pure tone with a fast rise time and a slow and continuous (not amplitude-modulated) fall time (fig. 3).

Recordings were obtained from seven calling males, which were subsequently captured, measured and weighted (the weight of one male could not be obtained accurately because it was carrying a clutch of eggs). Average calling male SVL was 40.2 mm (SD 1.92, range 38–43,  $n = 7$ ); average calling male weight was 6.91 g (SD 1.01, range 6–8,  $n = 6$ ). Average air temperature during recording was 16.0°C (range 15.2–17.4°C); average soil temperature was 15.9°C (range 13.1–18.9°C). A total of 202 calls were analyzed, the minimum number of calls analyzed per male was 17 and the average was 28.8.

The values measured for call duration and frequency obtained from the focal recordings are shown in tab. 1. Data on call interval were not calculated because the recordings were made while stimulating males' responses with the emission of vocalisations and whistles by the experimenters. No measurements of Sound Pressure Level were obtained, but the overall call intensity resembled that of the Iberian species.

Calls were recorded with the automated recording system from 4 a.m. to 6 a.m. (GMT) on 23 April (air temperature 8.1–8.3°C, soil temperature 11.1–11.2°C, relative humidity 96 %) and 8 p.m. to 2 a.m. on 23–24 April 2010 (air temperature 9.6–10.8°C, soil temperature 11.6–12.5°C, relative humidity 95.2–95.8 %). In both cases, noise of heavy rainfall was recorded before the calls. A total of 466 male calls were recorded and analyzed (tab. 2), which included calls in 13 discernible frequency categories. Given that male call frequency does not change within calling nights in other species of *Alytes* (MÁRQUEZ & BOSCH, 1995), we estimate that this was a minimum number of calling males in these recordings. In 9 cases, individual calling males could be reasonably identified and inter-call intervals of the (likely) same individual could be measured. Given that these call intervals were not affected by artificial calls produced by the researchers, they are included in tab. 2. Call frequencies were similar to those obtained in the focal recordings. On the other hand, call durations were longer, probably a consequence of lower calling temperatures (see MÁRQUEZ & BOSCH, 1995).

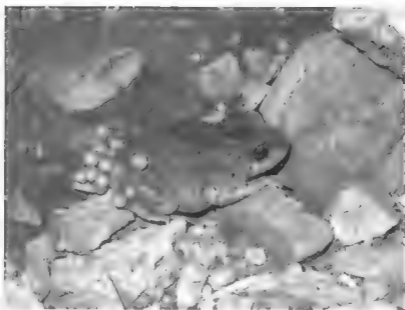


Fig. 1. - Male of *Alytes maurus* with a clutch of eggs. © R. Márquez.

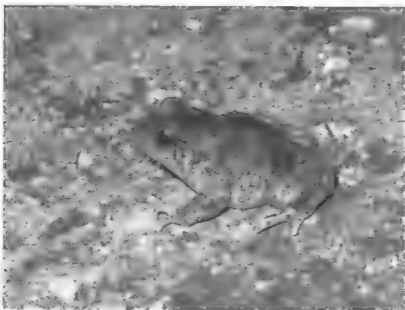


Fig. 2. - Female of *Alytes maurus*. © R. Márquez.

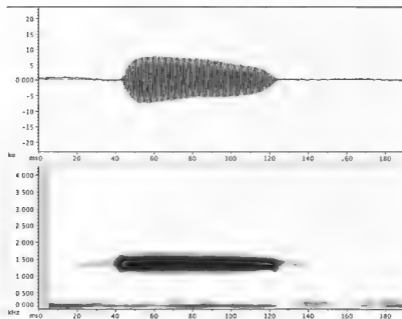


Fig 3 - Oscillogram (top) and audiospectrogram (bottom) of a male advertisement call of *Alytes maurus* (SVL 40 mm, weight 6 g), recorded at a soil temperature of 18.9°C. Sound parameters: 96 KHz, 24 bits. Spectrogram: FFT 512, Hanning filter.

## DISCUSSION

Overall, the advertisement call of *A. maurus* closely resembles the calls of the congeneric species from the European continent, being a short pure tone, with no harmonics, no frequency modulation (HEINZMANN, 1970; CRESPO, 1981; CRESPO et al., 1989; MÁRQUEZ & BOSCH, 1995) and substantially lower in frequency than the Balearic insular endemic, *Alytes muletensis* (BUSH, 1997). The relationship between call duration and temperature has been shown to differentiate between the continental species and subspecies of *Alytes* (MÁRQUEZ & BOSCH, 1995). If we compare the results obtained with *A. maurus*, the measurements from *A. maurus* are well within the range of values obtained for *A. obstetricans* in Iberia and are shorter in duration than those of *A. cisternasii* and *A. dickhilleni*. The similarity of the call of *A. maurus* with *A. obstetricans* is consistent with the closer phylogenetic affinity between these two species relative to *A. cisternasii*, which occupies an ancestral position in the genus (MARTÍNEZ-SOLANO et al., 2004).

The recordings obtained have a low standard deviation and range (less than 200 Hz). This is admittedly a limited sample size, but if the recordings from the automated device obtained over a complete season confirm this trend, this may indicate that the calling individuals are homogeneous in size (because size and call frequency are correlated in other

Table 1. Values of call frequency and call duration from the seven focal recordings made. Mean and standard deviation (SD) are the average of seven individual means. Range is maximum and minimum of all measured calls.

	Call frequency (Hz)	Call duration (ms)
<i>n</i> males	7	7
<i>n</i> calls	202	202
Mean	1324.24	97.34
Average SD (between males)	33.95	0.01
Range	1218.8–1406.2	77.0–217.0

Table 2 – Values of call frequency, call duration and call interval from the recordings obtained by the automated recording system. Mean and standard deviation (SD) are the average of all calls recorded (not grouped by individual). Range is maximum and minimum of all measured calls. Call interval was measured for nine clearly discernible individuals

	Call frequency (Hz)	Call duration (ms)	Call interval (s)
<i>n</i> males	13	13	9
<i>n</i> calls	466	466	243
Mean	1286.16	130.12	8.50
Average SD (between males)	26.89	0.02	3.94
Range	1238.0–1367.2	62.0–190.0	0.4–19.9

species of *Alytes*, see MÁRQUEZ, 1993) This homogeneity of size can be related to the possibility that only some cohorts reach sexual maturity (those produced in more favorable years). Of course this possibility needs to be confirmed by more continuous monitoring of the population.

The population of *A. maurus* analyzed was the only one where we could record calling activity in visits to more than seven different sites over five years where the species was previously reported in the Rif and Atlas Mountains of Morocco. In all of them the larvae were scarce or absent, and the sites all appeared to be encroached by human use of water resources. The other species of *Alytes* are known to be vulnerable to pathogens that cause the extinction of populations (BOSCH et al., 2001) and there are important conservation efforts in place in other countries (BOSCH, 2010). We believe that this species deserves a serious effort of monitoring (SLIMANI et al., 2010) and that its conservation status is likely to be more worrisome than currently believed (PLEGUEZUELOS et al., 2010)

## RESUMEN

El sapo partero marroquí es hasta la fecha la única especie del género *Alytes* cuya llamada de apareamiento aún no ha sido descrita. En este artículo se describe la llamada de apareamiento de esta especie a partir de grabaciones obtenidas en una población del Parque Nacional Tazzeka (Atlas Medio, Marruecos) entre el 21 y el 24 de Abril de 2010. Para el muestreo de las vocalizaciones se utilizaron dos métodos: (1) grabación de animales focales a corta distancia con grabadoras digitales (Sound Devices 722 y Sennheiser MKH70 u Olympus LS-10), y (2) grabación de coros con un sistema automático de grabación con temporizador (Song Meter SM1) con el que se realizará el seguimiento a largo plazo de la actividad acústica de la población. Los machos vocalizaron enterrados, bajo piedras o en la superficie, al atardecer y durante la noche de días lluviosos. La temperatura del suelo durante las grabaciones osciló entre 13 y 18.9°C. La media de tamaño corporal y peso de siete machos fue de 40.2 mm y 6.91 g (rangos 38–43 mm y 6–8 g). La llamada del sapo partero marroquí es un tono puro de corta duración, parecido a un corto silbido. Su estructura temporal se caracteriza por tener una fase de ataque muy breve, seguida de una larga caída sin modulaciones de amplitud notables adicionales. La duración total de la llamada fue de media 97.3 ms (rango 77–217 ms). La llamada tiene una estructura espectral simple y una sola frecuencia enfatizada (media 1324 Hz, rango 1218–1406 Hz), careciendo de armónicas y de modulación de frecuencia. En conjunto, tanto el tamaño corporal como los parámetros de la llamada de apareamiento del sapo partero marroquí se encuentran dentro del rango de variación de *A. obstetricans*. Las llamadas son más cortas en duración que las de *A. cisternasi* y *A. dickhilleni* a temperaturas similares.

## RÉSUMÉ

Le crapaud accoucheur du Maroc est la seule espèce du genre *Alytes* dont le chant d'accouplement n'a pas encore été décrit. Dans cet article le chant d'accouplement de cette espèce est décrit à partir d'enregistrements obtenus dans une population du Parc National de Tazzeka (Moyen Atlas, Maroc) entre le 21 et le 24 avril 2010. Deux méthodes ont été utilisées pour obtenir les enregistrements: (1) enregistrements focaux d'animaux localisés à courte distance avec un équipement audio (Sound Devices 722 et Sennheiser MKH70 ou Olympus LS-10), avec capture et notation de poids et taille corporelle après enregistrement, et (2) installation d'un système automatique d'enregistrement temporisé (Song Meter SM1) qui sera utilisé pour suivre la phénologie acoustique de la population. Les enregistrements obtenus ont été analysés avec le logiciel Raven 1.3. Les mâles émettent leurs chants enterrés, cachés sous des pierres ou sur la surface du sol, le soir et la nuit après des journées pluvieuses. La température du sol pendant les enregistrements était de 13–18.9°C. La taille et le poids moyens des sept mâles enregistrés et capturés est de 40,2 mm et 6,91 g (extrêmes 38–43 mm et 6–8 g). Le chant d'accouplement du crapaud accoucheur du Maroc est un ton pur de courte durée, semblable à un court sifflement. Sa structure temporelle ou enveloppe se caractérise par une attaque très brève et une descente plus longue sans avoir d'autres modulations d'amplitude appréciables. La durée moyenne des chants enregistrés est de 97,3 ms (extrêmes 77–217 ms). Le chant a une structure spectrale très simple centrée sur une seule fréquence (moyenne

1324 Hz, extrêmes 1218–1406 Hz), ne présentant ni harmoniques ni modulation de fréquence. En général, aussi bien la taille que les paramètres du chant d'accouplement du crapaud accoucheur du Maroc se trouvent dans le domaine de variation d'*Alytes obstetricans*. Les chants sont plus courts que ceux d'*A. cisternasii* et *A. dickhilleni* à des températures similaires.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was funded by the Comité Mixto Hispano-Marroqui (AECID, Spain), Acciones Integradas A/016244/08 and A/023074/09 (PIs, T Slimani & J F Beltrán) and by the project ACOURA, CGL2008-04814-C02 Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación (PI R. Marquez) It was authorized by the Haut Commissariat aux Eaux et Forêts et à la Lutte contre la Désertification (Maroc), Scientific Permits N°98/2009 et 15/2010 HCEFLCD/DLCDP/DPRN/CFF We thank M. Benitez, M. Chiroso, S. Fahd, J. Barbadillo and D. Donaire for their help in localizing populations.

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Corresponding editor, Stéphane GROSJEAN